The Land of Make-Believe

BEVERLY BAYNE, HEADLINER WITH BUSHMAN AT KEITH'S

NORMA TALMADGE, CRANDALL'S

VON STROHEIM AND MISS DUPONT AT LOEW'S COLUMBIA

WALLACE REID AND MARY MACLAREN, LOEW'S PALACE

BETTY COMPSON, AT MOORE'S RIALTO, IN "OVER THE BORDER."

EARLE FOXE, LEADING MAN AT THE BELASCO

JANE NOVAK, STAR OF STRAND SCREEN

GERALD OLIVER SMITH, POPULAR GARRICK PLAYER

RICHARD BARTHELMESS AND MARGARET SEDDON, METROPOLITAN

EUGENE O'NEILL STRONGER WITH CRITICS THAN AT BOX OFFICE; DREW LIGHT HERE

EUGENE O'NEILL'S vogue as the best American playwright appears to be well established with the Pulitzer prize judges of Columbia University, although the opinion is yet to be ratified at the theater box office.

The comment is prompted from the fact that "Anna Christie," the play which was accorded the distinction of being the best American drama fashioned in 1921, has been ekeing out a rather uncertain financial existence since leaving New York, where the O'Neill cult flourishes, and needed the revivifying influence of some such critical judgment in order to pay expenses.

It recalls also that when the prize play of 1919, "Beyond the Horizon," another O'Neill opus, was offered for the edification of Washington playgoers it drew a rather indifferent line to the Garrick Theater box office, so much so that Richard Bennett elected to play a distinctly mediocre melodrama for the second week of his engagement.

Thus while to O'Neill has accrued reputation, to others has gone the pelt. There is no indication in his later efforts that he has deviated from earlier ideals when the goal of his ambitions was the interpretation of his pen efforts by the Provincetown (Mass.) players, an idealistic group of actors in the little seaport town on the tip end of Cape Cod. Neither then nor now does he write for the box office. There are many—and not all managers or producers—who profoundly wish that he might, for the sordid and somber themes of "The Hairy Ape," "The Emperor Jones," "Beyond the Horizon," "The Moon of the Caribees?" "Gold," and the like are not the kind that attract overflow audiences or even provide the best entertainment for the masses. If that, as Patrick Henry says, be treason to the O'Neill cult make the most of it. But it is one opinion from one admirer of Eugene O'Neill and his brilliancy.

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WHILE on the subject of the box office value of plays, it might be pertinent to say that few managers have the much desired sagacity to pick winners. It was only a few short winters ago that we stood on the steps of our own National Theater and watched a meager line exit from a matinee performance of "Lightnin'," with the now renowned Frank Bacon in the title role. The box office figures for that afternoon were indeed slim, and Al Strassman, advance man of the John Golden production, ventured to ask: "Do you think this play will go?" Whereupon we replied, seconded by that eminent Washington impresario, L. Monta Bell: "It seems like a great little show," or something like that. Strassman appeared a bit relieved, for the box office figures up to that time were not of the kind that indicated a hit.

Two weeks later "Lightnin'" opened in New York, and remained continuously for three years, and is now rounding out one full year in Chicago. Such a success would never have been forecast on what "Lightnin'" produced at the box office in Washington.

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WHICH brings us to the current success of the New York stage, "Kempy." J. C. Nugent ought to be very well-known to the patrons of Roland Robbin's playhouse, for he has appeared as a two-day performer there many times. And not always as a star, or even headliner. All the while he was carrying around in his pocket the manuscript of "Kempy." Rialto gossip has it that he peddled it among the producers until it was dog-eared. They all turned it down. In desperation he produced it himself and the present indications are it will make him and the Nugent family exceedingly wealthy before it has run its course. Now those managers who are not pulling their hair are fighting for the manuscript of a second comedy from his pen, and they are willing to accept it without even a reading. Such is success.

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WITH two stock companies, Washington is getting more than the average share of June dramatic amusement and appears to be enjoying it. Incidentally, the stock or repertoire companies throughout the country are flourishing as they have not flourished in years. The reason for it all is that actors of genuine ability, after passing through a lean year, are not only willing but eager to listen to a limited engagement that will fill a depleted pocketbook.

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THAT genial manager of Mr. Rapley's playhouse, William H. Fowler, informs us that the new theater will be ready to greet the 1922-23 dramatic season some time in late September, and that bookings are already being made with that opening date in view.

In passing, it might be mentioned that the District Commissioners are credited with having withdrawn their ultimatum that all Capital theaters be provided with steel curtains.

EFFECT OF THE LONG RUN ON THE ACTOR DISCUSSED BY ONE WITH ALAN DALE

By ALAN DALE.

DO long runs spoil the actor? Does the constant repetition of a role get on the actor's nerves? Does he become so mechanical that his inspiration leaves him? These are questions often asked. Perhaps the time will come when they will be less frequently put. The long run seems to be dying out. There are few instances of it in the city at present. Short runs and the storehouse appear to be more appropriate topics of conversation. Runs that start "of a" Monday and end "of a" Saturday are so usual nowadays that they monopolize things, as it were.

Still, we have a few historical cases in our midst. For instance, we have "Kiki," at the Belasco. One or two other plays are creeping up and getting a record. But the fact remains that the season has largely been made up of short and inconsequential runs.

Still, the long run is a fascinating proposition. There is something psychologically interesting in the consideration of the actor or actress who repeats a role for a couple of hundred times and is supposed to be as much inspired at the two hundredth performance as he was at the first. As I only see first performances I am not an authority on others. But I have heard complaints of "staleness" that gave me food for thought.

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FRANK CRAVEN, who is making a record in "The First Year" at the Little Theater, says that everything depends upon the audience. "After a play has run a long time," he said, as I met him in the process of commutation the other day, "we get different audiences—and by that I mean audiences with a very different outlook. Of course, they know that the play is a success and has run for a long time, but they are not keyed up. They are there perhaps almost from a sense of duty. Their attitude is strange, and when that happens we feel it on the stage and perhaps our performance becomes less spontaneous. That is inevitable. On occasions like that we are more perfunctory and we feel our age! But let the audience adopt the usual attitude and we are as full of pep as ever.

"Nobody can realize the effect that audiences have upon the actor unless he is an actor. Sometimes it seems that the theater contains people who are there because there is nothing else to do. These people are not enthusiastic, but are a trifle negligent and lethargic. Instantly they convey their moods to the stage, and, in spite of ourselves, we are also negligent. These things happen when a play runs for a long time. In the case of short runs they are not, of course, noticeable."

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MR. CRAVEN says that he attributes his own buoyancy to the fact that he has been associated with laughter for so long. It has permeated his system, so to speak. His association with long runs has further given him opportunities to study audiences. They are of great importance to the actor. And by audiences I do not mean the first-night assemblages that do not represent anything at all. I mean the varied gatherings that flock to the theater during the run of a play. Oddly enough, there are people who see plays several times. To me that seems extraordinary. I cannot realize that there could be anybody willing to sit through any play more than once. I know that I couldn't do it myself. Mr. Craven insists that people go a dozen times to see a play that pleases them. Only the other day he met a chap who had seen "The First Year" a dozen times and now refused to go again since William Sampson died. There was a sort of sentimentality about the thing. This theatergoer had regarded the little play as a family affair and couldn't bear to see poor Sampson's successor. That is another psychological idea that the casual theatergoer does not consider. The first-nighter would rather be shot than go twice to the same play. There is no tinge of sentimentality about the first-nighter. He is perfectly callous to that sort of thing.

The fact that a play has been running for a long time also affects the attitude of those who see it for the first time. They have nothing to discover for themselves. Success has been discovered by others. The newcomers adopt a somewhat resentful attitude and are not easy to please. They are obliged to agree with others. Nobody likes to be forced to agree with anybody else. Also it would be bad taste to assert that a play did not please after it had been running a year and had evidently pleased.

Audiences who go to see plays like "The First Year," "The Bat" "Kiki" are bound to like them or else to stamp themselves as tasteless! I know that when I go to see a play that has been approved out of town (especially in Chicago) my attitude is somewhat different. One resents the other opinions, and subconsciously one almost hopes that one can disagree! Of course that is entirely a subconscious process.

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FREQUENTLY we get plays that are heralded as having been tremendous successes in other towns. Frequently illogical and shortsighted "press agents" send extracts to us from other cities, and—oh, what goat getters they are! Sometimes I feel that I couldn't possibly like a play that

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"Matinee Idol," No, Says Foxe

EARLE FOXE, the leading man of the Belasco Players, a hard-working, ambitious actor, anxious to succeed in his chosen profession and extremely thankful for the high measure of popularity he has acquired since he first began playing stock roles in Washington back in 1919, but—

There is one phrase Foxe detests above all others and that is being called "a matinee idol."

"I have never grown accustomed to the use of the term," says Mr. Foxe, "and I don't suppose I ever will. Somehow, it always reminds me of a species of he-vamp, with marceled hair, beaded eyelashes, and an indefinite suspicion of being a corset wearer. I don't exactly know where I got the idea, but I have it, and every time I hear the term 'matinee idol' I wince perceptibly.

"An actor, particularly the leading man of a stock company, has his working hours, like any other man. He has all the ordinary masculine instincts in the world, and he has no more desire to be considered a pretty man than anyone else. A certain measure of good looks is always an asset on the stage, but it doesn't mean that an actor is effeminate, simply because fortune chance to admire his type of acting.

"As far as I am concerned, I am very much in favor of forming a leading-man bloc in Congress to obtain a law making it a hanging offense for one human being to refer to another as 'a matinee idol.' It's too much for flesh and blood to bear all the time."

Stage and Screen Promise Well for Early Summer Amusements

KEITH'S—Billy B. Van and "Gentleman Jim" Corbett head bill next week.

Garrick—"Bought and Paid For," Broadhurst's gripping drama, is listed next.

Belasco—"Getting Gertie's Garter," a Hopwood farce, is next week's offering.

Rialto—"His Wife's Husband," with pretty Betty Blythe starring, will be the next feature.

Metropolitan—"Fools First," a Marshal Neilan production, is the coming attraction.

Palace—Elliott Dexter and Viola Dana will be the stars of next week's programs.

Crandall's—Trouble," "Beauty's Worth" and "Green Temptation" follow in order.

Reid's Car Small, But Shows Speed

AN eighty-five-mile-per-hour "bug!" This small car, perhaps the fastest for its size ever built, was especially constructed and equipped to hold the honor place in the transcontinental race which is the principal feature of Wallace Reid's new Paramount picture, "Across the Continent," to be presented at Loew's Palace for the full week, beginning this afternoon.

The machine is about the size of a stripped-down Ford. It was equipped with all the features of the racing cars, however, including Delco ignition system, Miller racing carburetor and Perfecto two-speed axle.

The car was geared three-to-one and was capable of attaining a speed of eighty-five miles per hour, although, according to the star, it was hard to hold it to the road when it reached its maximum speed.

Eddie Hefferman, expert mechanician, who was forced to retire from the racing game because of injuries received in a speed contest, spent several weeks getting the car in shape and perfect running order.